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ABSTRACT

Educational organizations, this paper asserts, are best described using a neorationalist model, which analyzes organizations as social instruments, acknowledges structural conflict, and views individuals as active participants. The paper examines traditional and modern rationalist organization theories and contrasts these with systems theory; it then applied the neorationalist model to schools, and specifically to Swedish public schools. The bulk of the paper discusses organization theory as follows. First, rationalism and systems theory are briefly compared in their traditional and modern forms. Second, traditional rationalism is explored in greater depth with reference to several of its leading theorists, notably German sociologist Max Weber; the "goals-means hierarchy" is briefly explained; and the basic assumptions of traditional rationalist models are discussed. Third, a neorationalist model formulated by the Swedish sociologist Bengt Abrahamsson is described; concerns discussed include the relationship between organizations and society and that between organizations' mandated goals organizations' mandated goals and the real activities. Fourth, the two rationalist approaches are compared. The remainder of the paper discusses analyzing schools using a neorationalist model. Subtopics include the correspondence between organizational models and school characteristics; the applicability of the neorationalist model to schools and appropriate descriptive concepts; and finally, types of institutional control and the control structure of the Swedish school system. (MCG)

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SCHOOLS AND THE NEO-RATIONALIST
MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONS

A report from the SIAu, SABO and PeO Projects

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PREFACE

The purpose of this report is to clarify and to some extent further develop a theory base for analysing the school as an organization (presented in Berg & Wallin 1981, 1982, and Wallin & Berg 1982). Above all it sets out to clarify the difference between a traditional rationalist and a neo-rationalist model of organizations.

The report has been produced within the context of three research projects currently being undertaken at the Department of Education, University of Uppsala, known by the initials SIAu, SABO, and PeO. These projects are described briefly below.

The *SIAu Project*, a follow-up of the 'Internal Work of Schools' (SIA) reform, is a five-year study funded by the Swedish National Board of Education. It is now in its fourth year. Its purpose is to follow up the changes Swedish primary and lower secondary schools have undergone as a result of the Internal Work of Schools reform and the new curriculum for compulsory schooling (published in 1980). One of the questions being examined is whether the fundamental aims of the reform have been achieved in the day-to-day work of schools.

The *SABO Project* (on work organization in schools) is financed by the Swedish Work Environment Fund. It started this year and will run for three years. The following fundamental issues are being considered:

- What are the features of existing work organization in schools and why are they as they are?
- What are the features of an 'ideal' organization of work?
- In what ways can work organization in schools be developed?

The *PeO Project* (on the relationship between educational research and organization theory) has more of a 'basic research' emphasis and is funded by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. At present PeO is a one-year pilot study, which may be followed by a larger-scale project. Its aim is to ascertain whether education as an academic discipline can extend its traditional territory with the aid of an organization theory approach.

As has been suggested already, this report can be regarded as a complement to our earlier papers on the school as an organization. However, it is not necessary to have read these before embarking on the present report.

Finally I would like to thank Bengt Abrahamsson and others who have commented on the draft. My thanks also go to Martin Taylor for translating the report into English.

Uppsala, November 1983

Gunnar Berg

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1 THE SCHOOL - AN INSTITUTION WITH 'INTENTIONS'

In Sweden, as in a number of other countries, the foundations of the educational reforms of the last thirty years were laid while the world was still in the grip of war. The experimental nine-year comprehensive schools of the fifties led to the first primary and lower secondary comprehensive school curriculum. Thus the old dual system of one school for the mass of the population, the *folkskola*, and one for the élite, the secondary *realskola/läroverk*, was replaced by a single type of school in which children were kept together for nine years. This change in the school system implied a new view of the role of education in society. It meant a democratization of schools, expressed not only in terms of the organizational framework - the comprehensive system. The new system also set out to make the day-to-day life of schools more democratic, as a reaction against traditional authoritarian schooling and as a means of educating democratically minded men and women, men and women who could resist propaganda and false ideologies - Nazi Germany was not to be repeated (Berg & Wallin 1983, p.7, my translation).

As the quotation above indicates, schools have not sprung up by chance, they are not - to use the vocabulary of systems theory - 'organically necessary'. No, schools have been created by society/the State to perform specific functions. The State, in other words, is the *mandator* of the school system. Historically schools have been given a variety of jobs to do. Isling (1980) argues that the old primary and lower secondary schools (*folkskola* and *realskola*) had, respectively, the functions of socializing and providing qualifications. The essential aims behind the creation of a nine-year comprehensive school are indicated by the above quotation.

In Sweden schools are part of the machinery of the State. The interaction of the Government and its agencies is described by the Swedish Agency for Administrative Development (Statskontoret 1977) as follows:

It is the Government's job to determine what function in society an agency is created to maintain. The Government makes political decisions, agencies make administrative decisions, i.e. their job is implementation. The basic principle behind our model of public administration is that a clear dividing line can be drawn between political and administrative decisions (p.64, my translation).

This model of public administration implies a view of planning and decision making as a *rational process*, i.e. as a number of logical steps in which different options are compared and the 'best alternative' chosen.

Subsequently the decision is implemented by the agency concerned.

This model is founded on a traditional rationalist approach to organizations, which in turn rests on a consensus view of society and its structure.

In reality, planning and decision making in public administration are not rational processes. 'Decision making is not a clear-cut, linear process,' was how Erik Wallin put it (Odin *et al.* 1983, my translation). He went on:

Admittedly decisions are made, but many influences are brought to bear on the lengthy process from which they evolve. This is one aspect of the question. The other is that when the decisions have finally been taken, something happens to them, particularly when the administrative process which we imagine will transform them into day-to-day activities is not all that simple. Decisions disappear... en route... The decisions that are made are often compromises. Opposing forces have been at work and decisions are reached which are not clear-cut but leave room for interpretation. [Interpretation] then gives scope for different groupings to play off their interests against one another in such a way that the decisions themselves more or less disappear.

Making and implementing decisions, then, is not a logical, straightforward algorithm, but an extremely complex process. Consequently the theoretical basis we use to study this process must be 'broad' enough to accommodate the complexity at which Erik Wallin hints in the passage quoted. A traditional rationalist (Weberian) model is incapable of capturing this complexity - it is far too rigid and normative to do so. What alternatives, then, are available? Since the war the answer taken for granted by organization theorists has been the natural systems model. The sociologist Bengt Abrahamsson, however, has convincingly demonstrated the drawbacks inherent in this model and developed an embryonic *neo-rationalist* model of organizations, which in my view has the breadth called for.

Below I will begin with a brief account of the differences between systems-oriented and rationalist organization theory. I will then describe in greater detail the differences and similarities between the traditional rationalist and neo-rationalist organization models.

2 TRADITIONAL RATIONALIST AND NEO-RATIONALIST ORGANIZATION THEORY

2.1 'Modern' and 'traditional' approaches to organizations

Considering the historical development of organization theory, we can discern two main directions: the *rationalist* model and the *systems theory* model. Both of these can be divided into a traditional and a more modern variety. These models are presented briefly below.

2.1.1 Traditional systems theory and rationalism*

An example of traditional rationalist organization theory is the work of the German sociologist Max Weber (e.g. *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, published in the 1920s). Basic to this approach is the conception that an organization is an *instrument* or *means* by which to accomplish certain goals defined by the creator or mandator of the organization. Ideally, organizational activities are consciously and *rationally* administered to promote the greatest possible achievement of goals. To make actors in an organization work in accordance with the mandator's wishes, according to the traditional rationalist, a detailed system of rules is necessary. This rule system can be said to be the mandator's guarantee that the organization will operate in line with his aims. *Formal organization* is a concept crucial to the rationalist approach. What it means is, for instance, that employees' actions are regulated by stringent job descriptions and that communication and information exchanges within the organization are based on the 'official channels' principle, i.e. in a vertical direction between superiors and lower ranking staff.

The systems-oriented school of organization theory is a reaction against the formalism and rigidity of the rationalist approach. The systems model does not view an organization primarily as a function of a particular goal laid down by its mandator. Rather, it is seen as a 'natural' entity, or *organism*, more concerned with *adapting* smoothly to its environment and hence increasing its chances of survival. For this to happen

* For a more detailed discussion of the difference between systems-oriented and rationalist organization theory, readers are referred to Gouldner 1961.

the organization must, among other things, maintain some kind of *equilibrium*, both in relation to the environment in which it operates and between the subsystems together making up its total structure. In the systems view, employees of an organization should not be governed by formal rule systems, such as job descriptions, since this type of control reduces the organization's flexibility, making it less able to adapt speedily to changing conditions in its environment. To sum up: if formal organization is the key concept of the rationalist model, the corresponding notion in the systems-oriented model is *informal organization*.

2.1.2 Modern rationalism and systems theory

Since the war, systems approaches have dominated organization theory. The rationalist model has been consistently rejected by most students of organizations. One reason for this may be that organization research has mainly focused on profit-making firms, which are basically governed by more or less unpredictable market forces. If a firm is to survive it needs a flexible structure which can adapt rapidly as market conditions change. The organic form of organization, with its roots in systems theory, has been judged to best meet these requirements. In more general terms, moreover, the rationalist model is regarded as 'anti-human', whereas the organic model is, for example, held to allow for individual 'self-actualization' in the psychologist Abraham Maslow's (1954) sense of the term.

Since the mid-1970s, however, rationalist organization theory has seen something of a revival. One representative of this trend in Sweden is the sociologist Bengt Abrahamsson (1977). He links organization theory to the existing social structure, which he describes in economic, political, and technological terms. The social structure imposes *constraints* on an organization's freedom of movement. Within these limits, the organization is controlled by its *mandators* with a view to achieving certain goals. Responsibility for ensuring that the organization operates in a direction compatible with these goals lies with the *executive*, i.e. the administrators of the organization. The degree of bureaucracy existing is, according to Abrahamsson, a measure of how far the administration of the organization departs from the mandator's intentions. A *legitimate administration* is one acting in accordance with the mandator's wishes, i.e. towards the goals laid down.

The systems theory school has also made advances in recent years. The sociologist Walter Buckley (1967) has perhaps contributed most here. He is critical of the static equilibrium thinking that earlier dominated the systems model of organizations. Buckley believes that conflict can in fact have a vitalizing effect on a system, and he develops from this idea a model of 'complex adaptive systems', in which emphasis is placed, among other things, on the learning capacity of the system, i.e. its adaptability to its environment.

The rationalist and systems-oriented branches of organization theory, then, are based on two opposed philosophies. The systems model is mainly concerned with informal organization and views organizational goals in terms of adaptation to the environment. At the root of this approach is a postulate of equilibrium. In traditional systems theory this equilibrium is seen as more static, whereas modern systems theory stresses the dynamic aspect of this equilibrium and adaptability approach. Conflict is acknowledged, but hardly conflict of a structural nature. Traditional rationalism in the field of organization theory emphasizes formal structure. In addition, organizational activities are seen as a product of the mandator's objectives. The neo-rationalist approach puts the organization in social perspective and regards bureaucracy as a measure of the degree of 'fit' between the mandator's wishes on the one hand and the administration of organizational activities with a view to implementing these wishes on the other.

Elsewhere (Berg 1981) I have expressed a preference for the neo-rationalist model as a basis for studying the school as an organization. I will be returning to this point in chapter 3, but in the mean time I will (as I indicated in the preface) describe in more detail the differences and similarities between traditional rationalist and neo-rationalist organization theory.

2.2 Traditional rationalist organization theory

As was suggested in the previous section, the German sociologist and student of the theory of science Max Weber was one of the leading figures in traditional rationalist organization theory. Other representatives of this school are the American Fredrick Taylor and the Frenchman Henri

Fayol. It should be pointed out, however, that there is an important difference between Taylor and Fayol on the one hand and Weber on the other. Taylor and Fayol were engineers pure and simple, seeing the organization as simply an instrument which could be manipulated in various ways to increase efficiency. Weber, on the other hand, was an authority on the theory of science and his work on organization theory has to be seen in broader context than that of Fayol and Taylor. Directly comparing Weber with these engineers is like comparing 'spirit' with 'matter'. Although all three were rationalists, they cannot be considered 'kindred spirits'. Below I will deal briefly with the work of Taylor and Fayol and in more depth with Weber's more fundamental thought.

2.2.1 Taylor and Fayol

Fredrick Taylor* was a prominent figure in the *scientific management* (SM) movement. According to advocates of SM the prime tasks of management included the scientific study of production processes and the development of systems for achieving optimum productivity. One of Taylor's principles was the development of a system of specially trained workers and supervisors, each responsible for particular stages of production - 'functional' leadership. Many of the general ideas of scientific management, such as piece-rates and time and motion studies, are still in use today.

In passing it can be mentioned that Callahan (1964) describes how in the United States at the beginning of this century attempts were made to apply SM theories to schools:

... introduce an organizational scheme which would offer children the benefit of these special studies and still be economical. This would be done through a departmentalized system in which the students moved from room to room. The plan was arranged so that all of the rooms, either home rooms or special rooms, were in constant use... When the bell rang, the students would shift to their next class.

[...]

... application of Taylor's system resulted in a cost analysis ... introduction of the dollar as criterion for judging the relative value of the various school subjects (pp.129, 159).

* A detailed account of Taylor's ideas can be found, for example, in Braverman 1974.

Another engineer, Henri Fayol (1965), elaborated normative theories on effective management. Unlike Taylor, Fayol believed that each employee should have only one superior, who would be responsible for six to eight employees. Thus a *pyramid* structure evolved. This approach is commonly known as 'classical organization theory'. In Fayol's wake there came organizational forms such as functional organization, line and staff organization, and so on. Largely due to its normative elements (various rules of thumb etc.), Fayol's classical organization theory is of great importance today.

2.2.2 Weber and the bureaucracy approach

Max Weber's theories of bureaucracy have been interpreted by organization theorists the world over for more than half a century. Let me briefly summarize an authoritative interpretation of Weber by the Englishman Martin Albrow (1970). Albrow's starting point is Weber's fundamental work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, which appeared in the 1920s and was translated into English in the mid-1960s (Weber 1964).

Martin Albrow makes the interesting point that Weber never actually defined the concept 'bureaucracy'. Rather, he built his theory of bureaucracy on the notion of authority. Authority can most easily be described as legitimate power, i.e. power accepted by all parties (both the executive and the employees). Weber divided authority into three types:

- 1) Traditional authority: employees accept orders from their superiors because tradition so dictates.
- 2) Charismatic authority: personal qualities in managers are the basis for employees' willingness to obey orders.
- 3) Rational-legal authority: employees' willingness to accept orders is connected with the feeling that they themselves have something to gain by doing so (see Weber 1964, p.328, for further details).

The concepts 'organization' and 'administration' are linked by Weber to the legal type of authority. Organization is interpreted as meaning 'officers (office-holders) with legal authority' and administration as meaning 'the exercise of legal authority'. By bureaucracy Weber meant, in Albrow's opinion, a 'group of officers in an organization who exercise

legal authority'. Weber's view of the relationship between the concepts authority, organization, administration and bureaucracy can, accordingly, be summarized as follows:

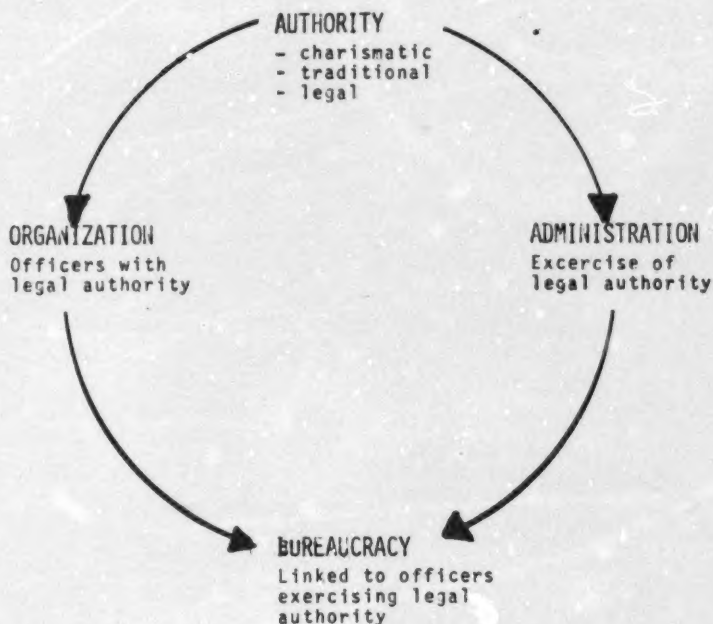


Figure 1. Weber's definition of bureaucracy (based freely on Albrow 1970)

Perhaps the most essential concept in Weber's theory of bureaucracy is what he calls the ideal type of bureaucracy, a yardstick, as it were, against which different empirical cases can be compared. The ideal type of bureaucracy can be expressed in terms of such principles as:

- 1) [Officials] are personally free and subject to authority only with respect to their impersonal official obligations.

[...]

- 5) Candidates are selected on the basis of technical qualifications.

...

- 6) They are remunerated by fixed salaries in money, for the most part with a right to pensions... The salary scale is primarily graded according to rank in the hierarchy...

[...]

- 8) ... There is a system of 'promotion' according to seniority or to achievement, or both...

[...]

- 10) [The official] is subject to strict and systematic discipline and control in the conduct of the office (Weber 1964, pp.333f.)

Max Weber's basic thought was that the more an organizational structure met the criteria for the ideal type, the more it was characterized by bureaucracy and, consequently, the more efficiently (rationally) it worked.

A point raised about Weber's theory of bureaucracy by Abrahamsson (1975) is worth mentioning here. It is his view that Weber seems somewhat uncertain as to the autonomy of a bureaucracy in relation to its mandators. On the one hand, Abrahamsson claims, Weber stresses that a bureaucracy is and has to be completely subordinate to the leading stratum of society. Elsewhere, however, Weber appears to doubt the general validity of this principle. In a later work Abrahamsson (1983) puts this as follows:

'Bureaucracy' is the term popularly used to label the phenomenon of an organization's administration working for illegitimate purposes or using illegitimate means. Thus, the meaning of 'bureaucracy' goes far beyond the mere concept of form captured by the Weberian ideal type of legal authority... Indeed, a major theme in Weber's own writings was the identification of the negative consequences, i.e. dysfunctions, that resulted from the increasing dominance of rational-legal administration... The dysfunctions treated by Weber have more to do with the *illegitimacy* of bureaucratic administration than its possible inefficiency due to trained incapacity, overconformity to rules etc... As Albrow... points out, Weber never intended his ideal type as a eulogy of efficiency (p.4).

2.2.3 The goals-means hierarchy

The strategy for organizational control which is compatible with traditional rationalist organization theory is the 'goals-means hierarchy', which can be illustrated as follows:

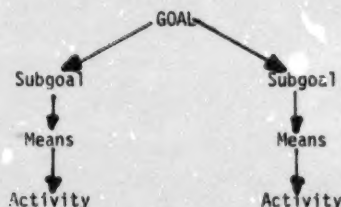


Figure 2. The goals-means hierarchy

The organization has a principal goal which can be broken down into subgoals. These can be put into operation as means, i.e. rule systems in harmony with the subgoals. Goals and means control the actual activities of the organization, which are assumed to adhere closely to the mandator's wishes (i.e. to the overall goal of the organization). 'For such a system to exist,' Sandberg writes, 'the units of the organization must be independent of one another and each must have a one-dimensional goal which has been passed down through the hierarchy' (1980, p.163, my translation). It may be added here that the organizational ideal constituted by the ideal type of bureaucracy, outlined earlier, can be regarded as the perfect goals-means system.

2.2.4 Traditional rationalism: a model based on harmony and a more or less passive conception of the individual

Taylorism (scientific management) is founded on what can be termed a 'mechanical' view of the individual. This is illustrated by Taylor's principle of functional leadership (see Braverman 1974). As was mentioned earlier, the idea behind this is, broadly speaking, that a productive system can achieve maximum efficiency by training specialists in each particular area of work. This system also requires considerable specialization on the part of supervisors. It presupposes that workers can adapt to their machinery and be its obedient slaves - the ideal, in other words, is that harmony should arise between man (or woman) and machine. The very existence of the system depends on this harmony. The conception of the individual on which this way of thinking is ultimately based can be outlined as follows:

- financial motives are the principal driving force behind human behaviour
- human beings are irrational and unable to decide what is in their own interest (cf. Schein 1970).

Put more drastically, the view is that human beings are chiefly governed by a herd instinct and relatively easily steered and manipulated. This view of human kind must of course be seen in the light of the spirit of the age in which Taylor elaborated his theories. Judging his thoughts by present-day standards would be to make a mistake many historians warn us against, i.e. evaluating the past in terms of the present.

As I pointed out earlier, what Taylor and Weber have in common is that they are both traditional rationalists. But, notwithstanding this common denominator, the differences between them are striking. It is therefore far more problematical to decide categorically where Weber's thoughts on organization are to be placed in terms of the dichotomies conflict - consensus and active - passive views of the individual. I will nevertheless attempt to discuss Weber in these terms.

Weber's criterion for judging whether an organization is rational is that as far as possible the organization should fulfil the criteria of the ideal type. I can only interpret this as an expression of a basic consensus philosophy; that is to say, a rational organization is characterized by harmony between the criteria of the ideal type and the organization's actual structure. Another of Weber's central concepts - legal authority - is also an expression of a harmony-based approach, since it is a type of authority accepted by all parties in an organization. The goals-means hierarchy is also clearly consensus-oriented, since it relies on a straight, unbroken line from the mandator's objectives to the actual activities of the organization.

Weber's approach, then, is in my opinion compatible with a harmony model of some description. However, it is unreasonable to claim that the view of human beings informing Weber's organization theory is 'mechanical'. As I have said, the notion of legal authority implies that all parties accept in one way or another the fact that some people in an organization have more authority than others. Humans, then, are not 'machines', but

'a factor to be reckoned with' in this connection. On the other hand, the normative criteria of the ideal type imply that, once an organizational structure has been established by legal authority, the officers within it are ensnared in a detailed system of rules which leaves them little or no room for independent action.

The ideal type of bureaucracy, then, presupposes that it is possible and indeed desirable to place actors in a tightly rule-bound structure which requires them to be passive when it comes to other aspects of the organization's activities than those directly related to their official duties.

To sum up, it is my belief that traditional rationalist organization theory rests on harmony and a more or less passive view of the individual. It must be stressed, however, that the nature of this harmony and passivity differs quite considerably between Weber's and Taylor's rationalist approaches.

2.3 Neo-rationalist organization theory

2.3.1 The link between organizations and society round about them

Modern organization theorists working directly on the basis of Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy or Taylor's organization theory are few and far between. One of the few to have developed on Weber's theories is the sociologist Bengt Abrahamsson (1977), who has created a model based on rationalist principles. Below I will attempt to outline briefly this neo-rationalist approach to organizations. Abrahamsson writes that 'organization theory can only be subjective within the scope defined by [material] factors; and numerous suggestions have been made, with varying degrees of materialistic determinism, as to how wide this scope is' (p.120, my translation). Subjective rationalism, then, is limited by material circumstances. These can, in Abrahamsson's view, be described in terms of the economic, technological and political structure of society (cf. Hernes 1978). This link between the existing social structure and an organizational structure is in my opinion a crucial development on Weber's theory of bureaucracy. As was pointed out earlier, in Weber's writings we find a note of uncertainty as to the relationship of a bureaucracy to the society in which it is located. The relating of social to organizational

structure is also essential in that it clearly marks the position of organization theory as a social science. In a field dominated by business administration approaches, such links are fairly rare.

In the neo-rationalist view, an organization is established by an interest group - a mandator - to promote its interests. The organization's executive organ consists of one or more executives whose job it is to implement the mandator's objectives with the help of the other employees of the organization. Abrahamsson goes on to discuss three levels encompassed by the neo-rationalist approach. The first is the theory of bureaucracy, concerned with the relationship between mandator and executive. The second is administration theory, which covers control of the organization's production. And finally he examines socio-technical adaptation theory, which relates to the commitment of employees to the organization's activities.

A controversial element in this neo-rationalist model is Abrahamsson's interpretation of the concept of bureaucracy. 'Bureaucracy... in the abstract sense of the term,' he writes, '*signals a tendency for the administration of the organization to depart from the interests which it was set up to represent*' (1975, p.19, my translation, original italics). He also argues that 'The *raison d'être* of the theory of bureaucracy is to find a solution to the conflict between the two barely compatible goals *administrative efficiency and representative administration*' (p.23, original italics). Elsewhere Abrahamsson uses the notions legitimate and illegitimate administration to refer to the social phenomenon expressed above. Legitimate administration, that is, is in line with the mandator's wishes (i.e. representative administration), whereas illegitimate administration corresponds to what is termed 'bureaucracy' above, i.e. the executive is oriented away from the interests it was set up to serve.

The neo-rationalist model described above can be summed up using the following - naturally highly simplified - diagram:

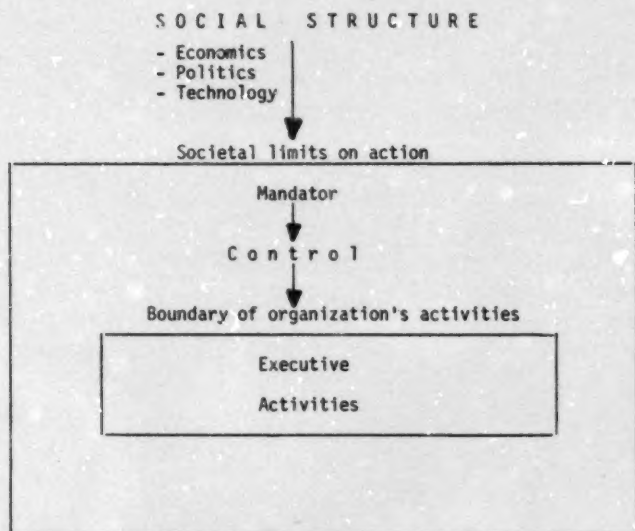


Figure 3. A neo-rationalist organization model (based freely on Abrahamsson 1977)

The existing social structure imposes limits on activities in society generally. Within this 'macro-boundary' the organization is created by a certain interest group (mandator) to perform certain functions. Responsibility for harmonizing the organization's activities and their administration with the mandator's interests lies with the executive. A legitimate administration can be called representative, while an illegitimate one counteracts the mandator's interests to a greater or lesser degree.

The second important difference between traditional rationalist and neo-rationalist organization theory (the first being the linking of the organization to the structure of society) is that the latter approach is compatible with a conflict model. For an organization to be analysable according to the traditional rationalist model there has to be some form of agreement or harmony between its actual activities and the criteria

of the ideal type of bureaucracy. If this is not the case, the ideal type can be a yardstick which can be used to compare different empirical cases. Basically, however, the neo-rationalist model can be used as an instrument of analysis regardless of how far an organization deviates from its mandator's wishes. One of the important assumptions of the neo-rationalist approach, in other words, is that people have different goals and that these may be - and often are - incompatible to a greater or lesser degree with the organization's (or the mandator's) goals. Thus the neo-rationalist approach does not view human beings as passive, but rather as active, critical, and creative.

2.3.2 Mandator's intentions versus the content of organizational activities

To further demonstrate the breadth of the neo-rationalist model of organizations as an analytical tool, I will avail myself of the following diagram, in which the mandator's intentions as to an organization's activities are set against the actual content of these activities.

		MANDATOR'S INTENTIONS	
		Unambiguous	Ambiguous
CONTENT OF ACTIVITIES	True to mandator	A	C
	Not true to mandator	B	D

Table 1. Mandators intentions vs content of activities

This cross-tabulation gives us the following typical cases:

- A) The mandator has clear and explicit aims as regards the organization's activities. Actors (executives and other employees) adopt these aims and act accordingly.
- B) The mandator has clear and explicit aims. Actors neither adopt them nor act in accordance with them.
- C) The mandator announces conflicting aims. Actors act according to conscious choices among them.
- D) The mandator announces conflicting aims. Actors act according to entirely or partly different criteria (e.g. traditions).

The traditional rationalist model can only be used to analyse situations corresponding to type A and 'half' of B. Activities falling within cell A can, to use Weber's terms, be related to legal authority. I write 'half' of cell B because organizational activities must bear some relation to the ideal type's criteria of efficiency if they are to be analysable using the Weberian model. The neo-rationalist model can in my opinion be used to analyse activities falling within *all the above categories*; it is of no real significance whether the mandator's directives are unclear or organizational activities conflict with these directives.

2.4 Traditional rationalism and neo-rationalism: some fundamental similarities and differences

My comparison of traditional rationalist and neo-rationalist organization theory can be summarized as follows:

		Traditional rationalist organization theory	Neo-rationalist organization theory
S I M I L A R I T I E S	Establishing of organization	An organization is created by an interest group (mandator) to achieve the aims of that group	
	Task of organization	To promote the mandator's interests	
	Structure of organization	Hierarchical	
	Goal of organization	An independent variable: the goal is a 'cause', activities an 'effect'	
D I F F E R E N C E S	Link between social and organizational structure	Unclear	Problematised
	Conflict/consensus	Consensus	Conflict
	Basic conception of the individual	Passive	Active

Table 2. Traditional rationalist and Neo-rationalist organization theory: similarities and differences.

2.5 Traditional rationalism and neo-rationalism - an essential difference or one of degree?

I have now outlined some of the differences and similarities between the two organizational models in question. Before going on to discuss their relationship to schools as organizations, I would like to consider whether the differences between them are so fundamental that we can talk of essentially different models. The similarities they exhibit might at first tempt us to reject such a claim. In my view, however, the shift from a harmony-based model to one founded on conflict is such a crucial step that the question at least merits consideration. As things stand today it is hardly possible to offer a clear-cut answer; before that can be done more empirical research is needed. It is clear, however, that now that the foundations of a neo-rationalist model of organizations have been laid, a new avenue of organization theory has been opened up. Organization theory has now been clearly linked to the social sciences and the organic (natural systems) model is no longer the only alternative to mechanical views of organizations.

3 SCHOOLS AND THE NEO-RATIONALIST MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONS

3.1 Point of departure for analysing schools

In the last chapter I compared the traditional rationalist and neo-rationalist organization models in terms of certain basic characteristics. In my doctoral thesis (Berg 1981) I express a preference for the neo-rationalist model as an interpretive framework for use in studying the school as an organization, my reason being that this model is broad enough to capture the complexity characteristic of school organization. In my thesis I also argue that schools have certain peculiar features which are incompatible with a systems model of organizations. The diagram below illustrates the differences and similarities between the various organization models, alongside a number of fundamental features of schools as organizations. The diagram is an extension of the one in section 2.4.

	Traditional rationalist organization theory	Neo- rationalist organization theory	Organic organization theory	SCHOOLS
Establishing of organization	By a particular interest group/mandator		Organic necessity	Society/the State creates schools to perform cer- tain functions
Tasks/goals	To promote the mandator's interests		Adaptation to environment	Socialization/ provision of qualifications
Organizational structure	Hierarchical		Network	Hierarchical
Link to social structure	Unclear	Organization part of social structure	Unclear	Schools part of machinery of the State
Conflict/ consensus	Consensus	Conflict	Consensus	Conflict
View of individual	Passive	Active	Fusion of organizational and indivi- dual demands	Active

Table 3. The systems model, the rationalist model, and the school -
a comparison (development on Berg 1981, p.92)

3.2 Applicability of the neo-rationalist model to schools

On the strength of my discussion above, I believe that the neo-rationalist model, as described by Abrahamsson (1977), for example, meets the fundamental criterion for a theory of the school as an organization, namely that it take account of the conflict which typifies school organization. In other words, I believe that the school as an organization can be described in neo-rationalist terms. This does not mean, however, that Abrahamsson's model can be accepted without reserve. The school has certain characteristics which distinguish it from other types of organization, and this must of course be reflected in the organizational model of the school which we evolve.

The mandator of the school is the State, which has created the education system in order, for instance, to introduce young people to its prevailing value system. The will of society is not uniform and unequivocal, however, and the State can therefore only express its wishes in vague terms. These hazy policy wishes thus have to be interpreted, primarily by executive bodies. In the Swedish education system there are at least four executive levels: the National Board of Education, county education boards, local education committees, and headteachers, and they are responsible to the State for ensuring that the school functions in accordance with current aims.

One important task incumbent on the executives, then, is to interpret the wishes of the State. Basically this involves each executive level progressively restricting the freedom of movement (cf. Wallin & Berg 1983) of the next level down as a result of its interpretations. The interesting thing is that what these executives primarily interpret are rules governing school activities. There is little evidence of their interpreting educational goals to any great extent.

This has the consequence that by the time the rules have finally filtered down to the schools themselves, they have acquired a more or less directly controlling quality, leaving little or no scope for interpretation by local school actors. At the same time, the school goal system reaches the local school in a more or less uninterpreted state. Thus it is basically up to the individual teacher to transform society's vaguely

worded educational objectives into concrete teaching. And this has to be done within the confines of a detailed rule system.

It would seem reasonable, then, to describe the executive organization of the school in more or less purely bureaucratic/administrative terms. That is to say, there is little in the way of extended professionalism (cf. Berg 1983) built into it, and as a result the teachers in this compact bureaucratic/administrative structure find it difficult to assert their professionalism.

A theory of the school resting on neo-rationalist assumptions must of course also take into account the pupils, since when all is said and done it is for their sakes that schools exist - and not vice versa. Below I will discuss the pupils in terms of the school as a coercive organization. A prerequisite for pupils to be able to share in planning and responsibility for their lessons is that they have a positive involvement in their schoolwork. This commitment must, however, be seen in the light of the fact that ultimately pupils attend school because of an obligation rather than a voluntary undertaking.

3.2.1 A conceptual framework for describing the school as an organization

Thus far I have chosen a neo-rationalist model as the most suitable for organizational studies of schools. I have earlier defined school organization as a function of the control exercised by both society and school actors (see Berg & Wallin 1981, 1982). There I also attempt to explain *why* I think it essential to analyse the school from an organizational angle. To obtain a concrete picture of school organization, however, it is necessary to go one step further and evolve a set of analytical tools with which to describe it. It is my view that the concepts *coercive organization*, *bureaucratic/administrative organization* and *professional organization* can help provide a relatively coherent picture of school organization.

The term *coercive organization* refers to the fact that pupils are recruited to the comprehensive primary and lower secondary school solely on the basis of their age and place of residence (compulsory school attendance = *structural coercion*). This coercion can be implemented in

different ways at the local level (*substantial coercion*). In extreme cases teachers and other members of staff can function in a purely supervisory capacity *vis-à-vis* their pupils. The term the *professional organization* of the school relates to the autonomy the curriculum allows school staff and how staff avail themselves of this autonomy. The school as a *bureaucratic/administrative organization* concerns the interaction of central (educational legislation etc.) and local rule systems (time-tabling, local resource utilization, etc.). When talking about the bureaucracy of the school, I mean there is a discrepancy between rules and goals, while the opposite state of affairs holds when I talk in terms of its administration.

3.3 Neo-rationalist control of schools

In the neo-rationalist model of organizations, goals, control, and planning are to be regarded as *independent variables*. In other words, what an organization actually does can be seen as a result of goals and of how its work is controlled and planned. The goals and control structure of the school are dealt with in some detail in my thesis (Berg 1981). Below I will give a bird's-eye view - and one differing somewhat from the approach in my thesis - of the control structure of the school. This structure is at present undergoing change and this process places partly new demands on actors in schools, demands that can be expressed in terms of *extended professionalism* (cf. Berg 1983).

3.3.1 Different forms of control

In general terms we can talk of the following different methods of control (cf. Ramström 1963):

- 1) *Direct control*. An employee receives direct orders from above, leaving no scope for individual initiative and independent action.
- 2) *Programme control*. Desirable 'programmes of action', to be implemented in given situations, are specified in rules of procedure etc.
- 3) *Limit control*. Various limits are specified which may not be exceeded.

- 4) *Goal control.* Goals as to desirable behaviour are specified and the goal-controlled person him- or herself basically decides by what means they are to be achieved (based on Ramström 1963, pp.30ff.).

Ramström's control categories can be directly related to my discussion of rationalist organization models earlier in this paper. Direct and programme control relate to traditional rationalist thinking on organizations, while limit and goal control are forms compatible with the neo-rationalist view.

3.3.2 The control structure of the school

The Swedish school system has basically been part of the machinery of State administration since the days of the Reformation, and it is therefore - and for other reasons - by tradition very much a centralized institution and organization. Ramström's notions of direct and programme control are therefore applicable to the way society/the State (the mandator of the school) has controlled schools in line with certain explicit and implicit objectives (regarding manifest and latent functions, see Merton 1957).

Let us refer once again to the four-cell diagram presented earlier (in section 2.3.2). The above discussion amounts to saying that the traditional functioning of schools can be assigned to cells A and B of the diagram. That is to say, the State laid down clear guidelines for the work of schools and their actual activities corresponded to these guidelines to a greater or lesser extent. This in turn means that traditional school activities can be understood and explained within a traditional rationalist framework of interpretation.

With the introduction of a new nine-year comprehensive school, and above all since the Internal Work of Schools (SIA) reform and the introduction of the 1980 national curriculum, this has changed. The new situation can be described as follows:

Control of
traditional
school system:
direct and
programme
control
(traditional
rationalist
control)

Control of
post-SIA school
system: limit
and goal control
(neo-rationalist
control)

Control by
means of
fine-meshed
rule systems,
e.g.
- teaching
qualifications
- agreements on
working hours
- content of
timetabling
guidelines

Control by means
of framework rules,
e.g.
- broader time-
tabling guidelines
(for junior, middle
and senior levels,
rather than years)
- free resource
utilization
- scope for locally
designed new sub-
jects
- municipal in-
service training

Actors required to:

Implement decisions
from above (i.e.
'restricted pro-
fessionalism')

Actors required to:

Utilize autonomy
arising from broad
guidelines and greater
goal control (i.e.
'extended profession-
alism'*)

Figure 4. Rule and goal control of the school system

The control structure of primary and lower secondary education in Sweden is now far more complex than ever before. At the same time as we now have framework rules and broad guidelines of the kind exemplified above, the rule system is still predominantly of a directly controlling nature. It is often claimed in official publications, for instance from the National Board of Education, that Sweden once had a rule-controlled, centralized education system, but that this has been replaced by one

* Regarding the notions 'restricted' and 'extended' professionalism, see Berg 1983.

which is decentralized and goal-governed. To my mind this is a misleading trade description of Swedish compulsory schooling. It is perhaps reasonable to claim that a process in the direction of greater goal control has been initiated, but since the predominant part of the rule system still embodies direct control it is hardly appropriate to maintain that all aspects of the school system are characterized by goal control.

The control structure of compulsory schooling today, then, can be located in cells C and D of the four-cell diagram. That is to say, the mandator does *not* state clear and unequivocal aims for the school system. Rather, in terms of the diagram, the control structure is characterized by ambiguous intentions on the part of the mandator and by organizational activities which are not true to the mandator's wishes. (For a more detailed discussion of the conflict-informed structure of the school, readers are referred to Berg 1981, chapter 6.)

This implies furthermore that organizational processes in schools can no longer be understood and explained from a traditional rationalist point of view, since this approach - as I observed earlier - is not broad enough to accommodate the complexity involved in cells C and D.

The greater the degree of goal control, the more pressing will be the need for a new kind of professionalism among school actors. In a school system governed by goals, it will no longer be a question of carrying out orders from above. Rather, actors will have to work independently within the *boundaries* to which the new control structure will give rise.

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